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BOOK SAYS CIA ONCE AIDED CASTRO'S MOVEMENT
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WASHINGTON

The Central Intelligence Agency, which allegedly sponsored numerous assassination attempts against Cuban President Fidel Castro, secretly provided financial support to Castro's movement prior to his triumph in 1959, according to a new book.

Tad Szulc, author of "Fidel, A Critical Portrait," said the CIA's apparent goal in providing the movement with "no less than \$50,000" was to purchase goodwill for the United States among the rebels in the event they triumphed.

The irony of the CIA's reported role in support of the rebellion is that the CIA sponsored an exile invasion of Cuba in 1961 and later sought on eight occasions to assassinate Castro, according to a 1975 Senate Intelligence Committee report. Castro has said there have been 25 such attempts on his life.

Whatever the figure, Szulc said the CIA had a far more benign view of Castro's 26th of July movement as it was gathering strength in the fall of 1957, slightly more than a year before it ousted the rightist dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.

"Uncle Sam was engaged in a number of actions in Cuba that were both contradictory and mysterious," Szulc wrote. "On the one hand, the United States continued to supply the Batista regime with weapons to fight the rebels, while on the other hand, it secretly channeled funds to the 26th of July Movement through the CIA. "He said it was unclear whether the operation was formally authorized by the Eisenhower administration or undertaken by the agency entirely on its own. It also was uncertain, he said, whether Castro himself knew of the funding.

"A new reconstruction of this United States involvement with Castro shows that between October or November of 1957 and the middle of 1958, the CIA delivered no less than \$50,000 to a half-dozen or more key members of the 26th of July Movement in Santiago," Szulc wrote.

While saying that the entire operation remains a top secret of the U.S. government, Szulc said "it is a sound assumption that the CIA wished to hedge its bets in Cuba and purchase goodwill among some members of the Movement, if not Castro's goodwill, for future contingencies." He added that the United States pursued dual track policies elsewhere in similar circumstances.

Asked about Szulc's account, CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said Friday night it would take several days to determine whether the agency would be able to comment, given the fact that the report deals with an event that occurred almost 30 years ago.

The Polish-born Szulc was a longtime correspondent for The New York Times, and has written several books on Latin American and Caribbean affairs. He lived in Cuba in 1984 and 1985 to research the book.

In the book, Szulc claimed that Castro was a confirmed Marxist on taking power in 1959, thus rejecting the impression among some that the United States drove him into the arms of the Soviet Union through its hostile policies.

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"Castro set out from his first day in power to destroy every vestige of the old social order in Cuba," Szulc wrote. "He accomplished it through the extraordinary procedure of operating for well over a year a 'parallel' government in Havana, concealed from his own cabinet ministers, to say nothing of his fellow Cubans." The initial revolutionary cabinet, Szulc said, was dominated by moderates, a recognition by Castro that his rebel backers lacked training and that swift movement toward a Marxist state "would trigger violent opposition from large segments of the Cuban population and the United States." While secretly planning a Marxist future for Cuba during the early stages of the revolution, the author said Castro "savagely rejected domestic and foreign accusations that communism was creeping into his 'humanist' revolution." Szulc said Castro even imprisoned on charges of treason his wartime companions who resigned their posts over this issue.

"By the end of 1960," Szulc wrote, "his (Castro's) police and political controls were strong enough to cope with domestic opposition, and his relations with the United States had deteriorated to such a point that he no longer had to take the American factor into account when formulating his defiant policies.

"At that point, Castro could afford to ally himself openly with the communists of the Popular Socialist Party," Szulc wrote.